

Mr. Ezra informs me that the present animal was killed in the Maharajah's territories six years ago.

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XIV.—*Notes on Animals observed at the Alipore Zoological Garden.* No. III.  
*Melanic specimens of Common Palm Squirrel* (*Sciurus palmarum*, Linn.)—By RAI R. B. SANYÁL BAHADUR, Superintendent, Alipore Zoological Garden.

[Read June 4th, 1902.]

Squirrels, it is well known, are subject to great diversity in size, form and colour. The upper surface of the body of the large Indian Squirrel (*Sciurus indicus*, Erxl.) is usually of a maroon red colour, but darker, almost black individuals with thicker coats are not uncommon. Apart from their seasonal dimorphism, no two specimens of the *Sciurus bicolor* of Sparrmann are alike; and it is no wonder that the species proved a puzzle to Desmarest, Horsfield, Is. Geoff. St. Hilaire, and other naturalists of classic repute, each of whom described it under a different name. Palm Squirrels (*Sciurus palmarum*, Linn.) so common and abundant in Bengal, North-Western Provinces, the Punjab, and Central India, are also remarkable for great diversity of form and colour, and this tendency to variation in colour, which is so characteristic of the genus, has led, in the case of the Palm squirrels, to an increase in the deposition of pigment, resulting in the production of a definite melanic form.

Melanism as a common colour phenomenon is well known to naturalists, but as far as I remember, I have seen no case of complete melanism in squirrels recorded in the literature of the genus, and I have therefore ventured to exhibit to the Society a melanic specimen of a Palm squirrel which lately came under my observation. The following notes sent to me by Haji Mahammud Mustapha Khan of Aligarh, the donor of the animals, will, I hope, be found interesting:

“Some time in December last [1901], so far as I can recollect, my bearer came to me in Aligarh and said he had seen four or five black squirrels in the jungle at Burhegaon. Burhegaon is the headquarter village of my estate, in Tahsil Atrauli in this district, and lies about 25 miles east from Aligarh. I told him to try and catch them, and explained to him how best to do it by the usual basket snare. About a fortnight later, when I had gone to stay for a time at Burhegaon, he brought one of the squirrels to me. A couple of weeks after that he brought a second one. So far as I can judge they seem to be

a male and a female. There was a third, he told me, which eluded capture on the second occasion. They seemed to me uncommon, and remembering to have heard, at a District Board Meeting, that the Secretary of the Zoological Gardens at Alipur would be glad of help in procuring interesting additions to his family, I mentioned the matter to Mr. Brownrigg, then Collector of the District. I have always taken an interest in animals, but had never seen any black squirrels like these before. I am told that there are still, perhaps, three or four more at large in the jungle where this pair came from, but they are now very wild, and do not allow any one to approach them. I am also informed, by those who have seen them, that these black squirrels live apart by themselves on separate trees, and do not associate with their less distinguished grey-mantled brethren. The boycott is probably mutual. I have no reason to think that they came to Burhegaon from any outside source. So far as I can see they are a freak of nature."

It would be interesting to observe other forms of animal life in the jungle in which these melanic squirrels were found, and to note whether there is any preponderance of black in them also. The fact, if proved in the affirmative, will give additional support to the theory of colour change induced by environmental causes.

This is, however, not the first time that melanic squirrels are exhibited in the Calcutta Zoological Garden. In 1877, a couple of them were obtained from Assam, and lived for about a year.

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